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March 9<sup>th</sup>

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An

Inaugural Essay

on

Dysentery

By

John Russell

of

Pennsylvania

admitted March 22<sup>d</sup> 1821.



The prevalence of Dysentery in Adams County Forme during  
three years of my apprenticeship to the Study of Medicine,  
its varied appearance in each of those years, & the consequent  
diversity of treatments, adapted to its cure, as well as the be-  
 lief early instilled into me, that the knowledge of treating successful-  
ly any one form of disease, according to rational principles,  
enables the person so endowed, to encounter every other which  
can present itself; have necessarily directed my attention pecu-  
liarly to this disorder; other reasons have influenced me in a-  
ccepting Dysentery as the subject of the following essay,  
altho' a trichina a theme, of which, not the least is that I  
have been enabled to draw on the experience of my master  
who has for this purpose granted me every facility by his oral  
remarks & the inspection of his manuscript journals. Thus,  
I trust, my essay will assume, at least, the appearance of  
novelty, & the writer not reproachable with the crime of  
wearing your attention by presenting you the mere ghem-  
ings of a limited reading of works of standard merit &  
universal acquaintance?

At one time, I intended, exhibiting a minute history of this

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in Spring of 1877  
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descriptive notes  
etc. The Observatory  
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a fever, vegetative  
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disorder during the year 1877 & 1878, with the preceding, accompanying & succeeding forms of disease; and also accompanying Meteorological tables; but on reflecting that of says of this kind are designed merely as lists of the Candidates talents and acquirements, so that it would be presumption in the highest degree, to aim at instructing learned professors I concluded that brevity would be the most acceptable mark of my respect. I have, therefore rendered my observations as concise as possible.

The Spring of 1877 was unusually wet; the summer also, was remarkable for the number of heavy showers, but with intervals of excessive heat; and Autumn set in with unaccustomed cold. The Dystrophy made its appearance in the latter days of June & gradually increased in the number of cases and the severity of symptoms until suddenly arrested by a copious fall of rain & subsequent frost late in August; after which there arose a few occasional cases, with more attenuated symptoms until the middle of October when it wholly desisted. Vegetation was very luxuriant & in the limestone districts in which the disease arose & was principally confined.

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being flat & watered by small streams & rivulets descending from the mountains, the grass & weeds from too luxuriant a growth having, early fallen down, obstructed in many places the small water courses & thus produced unusual & large marshes on which the summer sun must necessarily have generated miasma & impregnated the waters themselves with deleterious matter. That the disease of this year was induced (or its exacerbation) to marsh miasma & unwholesome water, is inferable from the fact that it never extended more than half a mile from some low marshy land or mountain stream.

The usual mode of attack was by chills, great languor & asphyxiation; erratic pains concentrating in the Abdomen, fever with full, tense pulse, ferruginous tongue & flushes of face; diarrhoea in a few hours terminating in destroying tenesmus with bloody stools. The pain at first wore the stamp of colic, but after some time abated in severity and descended to the lower part of the abdomen & pelvis, & generally induced extensive prolapsus ani. In some, the first symptom was the pain of the bowels; in others, the bloody stools & a few here were, who seemed to labour under fever of a bilious na-

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ture (such as had been customary in prior years) for several days before the dysenteric symptoms coincided themselves. There also occurred many other varieties in the form of attack & still more diverse peculiarities in the progress, but in all the stools appeared principally composed of blood of a peculiarly purulent nature, & defluxions of a mucous or sanguineo-mucous nature were rare. Thangury after a few days continuance of the disease was no uncommon symptom, & often to the patient very alarming, yet to the physician always pleasing as a certain precursor of speedy recovery.

The treatment found most successful, was in the first stages, bleeding until a reduction in the fulness, frequency & tension of the pulse was effected; followed immediately by brisk cathartics, as R. Calomel gr. xx. Salap gr. xx. M. or R. Calomel gr. xx. R. Rhubarb gr. xxv. M. or Calomel gr. x. - xx. assisted by R. Ricini 3. to be repeated every hour until the bowels are freely evacuated, or by some of the Neutral Salts, as Sulph. Soda 3. dissolved in 3vols of tepid water, or Sulph. Magnesia or R. Sol. Anna 3. Eau. Salt 3. - boiling water by one spoonful to be taken every hour until the bowels are freely evacuated. In many the bil or

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Salts alone were astringent to the intestine, but it was most ad-  
visable to premix the Calomel. After catharsis had been ~~effected~~  
it was always advisable to procure quietude by opiate as -  
Sulph. op. gutt. XII, or Sust. op. Camph. 3j repeated every hour until  
the despatch was accomplished; if afterwards it was found by  
a continuance or recurrence of the symptoms, that the bowels  
had not been sufficiently relaxed & evacuated, the purging  
must be repeated daily until all the retained feces shall  
have been excreted; the febrile action reduced, the pain & other  
symptoms mitigated; & the patient shall experience more  
sobriety. Then & not till then recovery may be prescribed  
for, by ordering tonics, as decoction of Gentian, Valerian &  
Columbo, in some cases with wine & water, but mostly it  
was hazardous to use any active stimuli; & invigorating  
diet was for the most part, all that was required. If however  
bloody stools continued into the convalescent state, they might  
be safely restrained by astringents & the pain alleviated by  
opiates for which purpose Kino combined with Opium answered  
very well. If costiveness should have supervened it must  
be promptly obviated, as its direct tendency was to a relapse.

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but to kill; or even  
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To keep the bowels open nothing more was necessary than cream of tartar wine, molasses water or an occasional dose of Castor oil; or where the patient was under the use of Tonics to commingle his bitters with Rhubarb to render them slightly laxative. To relieve the prolapse it was expedient to anoint the protruding part with an unguent composed of Fine & spruce in powder rubbed down in simple ointment, & then gently restore the part to its wonted situation. When the protruded parts were so much swollen as to prevent reduction, bad water frequently used as a lotion often allayses the inflammatory sense derived from an exposure of the parts to the fumes of rising thurs to the vapour of the decoction of Mullen leaves. Demulcent aet & drnks were at all times grateful & beneficial, & there being little nausea, could be indulged in copiously. Blisters or fomentations to the abdomen were rarely necessary, as the disease, if promptly treated, generally yields to the foregoing plan; but there were cases which had been trusted too long to nature or injudicious prescribers, which had assumed the dyspepsia state with so complete a prostration of the energies of the system as to require all

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The Stimulants we <sup>propose</sup> to rectify their in some such, ble-  
ster acted miraculously. If however they were applied whilst  
any inflammatory action existed, they certainly did harm.  
Syrupisms & even blisters to the tumulæ were admissible  
in almost every stage of the disorder, & were frequently atten-  
ded with happy effects: being mostly applied at night,  
in conjunction with the fomentations, they created a sudoriferous  
sensation, known by an universal diaphoresis, from which  
there was no more certain criterion of a salutary crisis.

The summer of 1819 was very hot & dry; most of  
our small streams ceased to flow early in July & the deeper  
parts of their channels became pools of stagnant water.  
The spring had been unusually healthy, but June brought  
Cholera Morbus & Diarrhoea, which prevailed until the latter  
part of July, when they yielded a rather place into Dysentery  
which continued increasing in violence till the middle of  
October, when it suddenly ceased. The disease of this year  
diffused in many particulars from that of 1817. It was confined  
wholly to the red or slate lands, the limestone district being  
entirely exempt from it. It was accompanied with nausea &

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Strawberry Root

vomiting in the first instance, & more or less irritability of Stomach accompanied until its close. The prostration of strength was greater & more immediate. The stools were a mixture of blood & mucus. The pain was higher seated in the umbilical region. There was greater soreness to the touch, so much so as often <sup>to</sup> force screams from the patient. The distension of the intestines <sup>was</sup> more inextirable & the difficulty of passing was greater. The skin was yellow, very dry & husky & more difficultly excited to despiration. The countenance indicated greater anguish. The mortality was much greater & probably owing to mistaken notions as to the kind & quality of treatment necessary, it having been so simple in the preceding year, that many persons believed themselves capable of curing it without the aid of physicians & consequently trusted to a dose of Castor oil & afterwards a decoction of Bear root. The disease would often yield partially to a cathartie, and after a trice of a few hours commence more terminating hostility. Hence the source of many fatal mistakes; the bowels having yielded part of their emphysema content, led to the belief that entire evacuation had been

affected. But  
by a combination  
they brought  
the natural  
water. It was  
by mistake, be-  
cause they  
wanted both  
water known and  
water of course  
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killed & parted  
by these other  
than three or four  
girls in the  
village this sea-  
son. The village in  
the winter of  
1814 & 1815  
had about 100  
people & was  
isolated & easily  
attacked at sea.

affected. But even where the natural feces were evicted freely by a cathartic, it was necessary to repeat them as long as they brought off matter wearing marks of having lain longer than natural; & until the griping & unnatural stools were corrected. It was always necessary to commence the treatment by emetics, because the Stomach required to be thoroughly evacuated before any other remedies could be exhibited, & their well known antispasmodic action tended much to the facility of overcoming the constriction of the upper intestine. They might be repeated several times in the progress of the disease, & particularly if the Stomach became distended, & refused other articles. It was often requisite to repeat them three or four times in the first stages, & had no bad effects in the latter. Bleeding was rarely admissible. Blisters this season were frequently used to overcome the excessive irritability of the Stomach, and always with the wished effect. They were generally applied on the Lorobanks Cordis, & were frequently kept discharging, on into cowals & various emollient & antispasmodic injections were valuable auxiliaries spurr'd at bed time & whenever the pain was great & the pa-

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1820

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ient not under the operation of cathartics, was indispensable,  
& it proved more grateful in substance & in time. As his  
agents were inadmissible in every stage, & even the mildest tonics  
could not be exhibited with safety were in convalescence.

1820 was still more dry and hot than the fore-  
going. Then having fallen but little rain during the winter  
& spring, in early summer we began to experience the effects  
of the excessive drought. Water was scarce & bad in all si-  
tuations, but in the uplands, where it was in ordinary per-  
tly & good, the inhabitants suffered more from the reverse than  
those not accustomed to such favours, hence probably the  
Dysentery was restricted this season to the mountains &  
highlands & those of the lower districts & who had suf-  
fered from its ravages the preceding year, were now  
unhonoured by its visit. It was ushered in this year with  
all the pomp of virulence it had acquired on its almost  
dry year the last year, & in a few weeks confined its action  
from which there was no abatement in its after course.  
It arose with August & existed until December, not-  
withstanding the heavy rains & subsequent early frosts.

of October 8 Nov  
the 10th to the 15th  
the Morris House  
with blood & the  
spur. All the time  
it was unknown  
in the afternoon  
the collection  
was quite full  
it was, was left

Then placed the  
body in a box  
frequently repeated  
the treatment  
of having been  
in the vicinity of the  
following house  
considering the  
large number of  
persons who  
lived in the parsony

of October & November. Intermittent fever also prevailed & the Dysentery sometimes assumed its robes. It was strictly the Morbus Mucosus. The stools were but very slightly tinged with blood & the quantity of mucus was astonishingly copious. Altho' tenesmus was agonizingly severe, prolapsus ani was unknown. There was generally a paroxysm of fever in the afternoon, at which time the skin was fuscous & the sclerotic of saffron a die as to render the countenance quite ferocious. In the exacerbation the skin altho' not cool, was dry, hot & husky & the countenance flaccid & even pitiful. The constipation was more incompressible & rarely yielded to cathartics, even of the most powerful & frequently repeated.

The treatment of former years was in this inefficient & after having been baffled in various plans by the violence & obstinacy of the disorder, we had at length to resort to the following, powerful, but simple plan. Calomel & Senna in nauseating doses repeated every half hour until loomin-  
ing or diarrhoea was produced. Castor Oil or Neutralized Sallet in the paroxysm which was usually in the afternoon

Right & during the  
flow of every hour  
reduced. If the  
want of quantity  
causes & obvious  
lack of force & time  
is soon fulfilled  
the influence when  
lasting of the disease  
is less than the fate  
of all nurse to  
be yielded to or  
removal of other  
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continues it took up  
truly is the disease  
height, its action  
nearly if person  
in charge of black  
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At night or during the exacerbation doses of Calomel & opium go very low until sleep or mitigation of pain was produced. If the Calomel & opium produced early, sounds of gurgles or salivation the disorder was instantly arrested & copious evacuations of brown faeces, & brownish black faeces & tracious bile showed that the indications were fulfilled. At this time a brisk cathartic (it made little difference what) was necessary to effect a thorough cleansing of the alimentary tube & induce the mercurial action & then the patient might be safely entrusted to a skilful nurse to convalesce. In some cases this year yielded to other treatment. Calomel could effect removal of obstruction & dislodgement of redundant bile only by creating its peculiar mercurial action. Sometimes it took effect immediately, at others, particularly if the disease had been suffered to gain strength, its action was resisted for some days, but ultimately if persevered in was uniformly successful. The discharge of black bile was the only certain precursor of amendment and guaranteed against death.

of chief cause of the  
success was the belief  
of the people that this was  
a yielding to a  
plot not only to  
overthrow & confound  
the government  
but to bring about  
the destruction of  
the people; now, for  
such a plot, the  
value was immeasurable  
and the plot of  
the people was  
of infinite value.

It is now necessary  
to consider the  
plot of the people  
and the value of  
the plot of the  
people.

The chief cause of the former very great fatality of this disease was the fatal supposition of its contagious nature; but happily this with many other items of traditional accuracy is yielding to reason & correct observation. This silly faith not only precluded the unhappy patients of the next series & comforts arising from good nursing & the consolatory presence of friends, but it deterred the Physician from obtaining that correct knowledge of the state of the disease; necessary to judicious prescriptions; hence the practice was empirical; the sufferer deprived of the sympathy of friendship & bereaved of every comfort, was permitted to sink to a neglected grave through a mass of his own accumulated folly.

That the ignorant & timid & credulous should have so long remained under the dominion of this absurd prejudice is not to be wondered at; but to the disgrace of the profession it must be acknowledged, that even yet there are some members so weak as to yield it the countenance. Was this of say designed for the public eye it might perhaps be proper to support by facts & reasons, my declaration

but under its cover  
all gradually by means  
of time & men's too  
long stay under the  
sun a sunburn is  
a sunburn I have ever  
seen it has prevailled  
but it did not last

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that under its every form it is now contagious, but the learned  
will gladly excuse the iteration. If I mistake not there  
are some & men too, renowned for learning & talents who  
say that under the Sophus form it may be communicable;  
in answer I have only to remark, that in my native Country,  
where it has prevailed under that form, experience boldly  
contradicts such an Hypothesis.

